In the claims:

Please amend claims 1 and 21 as indicated below:

1. (Amended) A method for the preparation of a phosphorus-linked oligomer comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a solid support;

(b) attaching a 5'-O-protected nucleoside to the solid support;

(c) deprotecting the 5'-hydroxyl of the nucleoside with a deprotecting reagent comprising a protic acid in a solvent to deprotect the 5'-hydroxyl of the nucleoside, the solvent being an aromatic solvent, an alkyl aromatic solvent, a halogenated aromatic solvent, a halogenated alkyl aromatic solvent, or an aromatic ether solvent;

(d) reacting the deprotected 5'-hydroxyl with an 5'-protected activated phosphorus compound to produce a covalent linkage therebetween;

(e) oxidizing or sulfurizing the covalent linkage to form a phosphodiester, phosphorothioate, phosphorodithioate or H-phosphonate linkage;

(f) repeating steps c through e at least once for subsequent couplings of additional activated phosphorus compounds, to produce the completed phosphorus-linked oligomer; and

(g) cleaving the oligomer from the solid support;

wherein steps (b) through (f) are performed using an automated device.

21. (Amended) A method for the preparation of a phosphorus-linked oligomer comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a solid support;

(b) attaching a 5'-O-protected nucleoside to the solid support;

(c) contacting the protected 5'-hydroxyl of the nucleoside with a deprotecting reagent comprising a protic acid in a solvent to deprotect the 5'-hydroxyl of the nucleoside, the solvent being an aromatic solvent, an alkyl aromatic solvent, a halogenated aromatic solvent, a halogenated alkyl aromatic solvent, or an aromatic ether solvent;

(d) reacting the deprotected 5'-hydroxyl with a 5'-protected activated phosphite compound to produce a phosphite linkage;

(e) oxidizing or sulfurizing the phosphite linkage to form a phosphodiester, phosphorothioate, or phosphorodithioate linkage;

(f) repeating steps c through e at least once for subsequent couplings of additional activated phosphite compounds, to produce the completed phosphorus-linked oligomer; and

(g) cleaving the oligomer from the solid support;

wherein steps (b) through (f) are performed using an automated device.